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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000100

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STATE FOR EAP AND IO; PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: THE NLD REACHES OUT, THAN SHWE DIGS IN

REF: A. RANGOON 73

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Classified By: Pol Officer Sean O'Neill for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) Summary. On February 6, the NLD Central Executive Committee (the Uncles) issued a statement inviting cease-fire ethnic groups to visit NLD headquarters in Rangoon for discussions. Some in the party leadership remain concerned about holding talks with these groups without Aung San Suu Kyi, but nonetheless thought it important to reach out, as she wanted. Despite the difficulty many cease fire groups will have with meeting at NLD headquarters in Rangoon, the Uncles have made no plans to reach out to those who can not make the trip.

2. (SBU) Authorities postponed a legal hearing for detained activist monk U Gambira and his brother. Arrested web-blogger Nay Phone Latt has been charged with violating the Video Act. If convicted he could receive up to three years in prison. End Summary.

NLD REACHES OUT

3. (C) On February 6, the NLD Central Executive Committee (CEC) issued a statement (dated February 5) inviting cease-fire ethnic groups to hold talks with party leadership at NLD headquarters. The statement specifically mentioned criticism of the NLD and ASSK by certain cease-fire ethnic groups that appeared in the regime-daily New Light of Myanmar in November 2007. Rather than condemn this criticism however, the CEC declared that disagreement was a part of democracy and said it believed discussion was essential for democratic change. The statement concluded by inviting groups that disagree with ASSK to visit NLD headquarters in Rangoon for discussions.

4. (C) NLD spokesman Nyan Win acknowledged to Poloff that many cease-fire groups would be unable or unwilling to accept the CEC's invitation to meet openly at NLD headquarters in Rangoon. Despite these difficulties, he expected some groups, like the New Mon State Party, would be willing and able to take the CEC up on its offer, although he could not justify these expectations. If other ethnic groups did not accept the invitation, the CEC would issue another statement inviting non-ethnic opposition parties to visit them. But Nyan Win said the Uncles have made no plans to offer alternate arrangements to ethnic groups who do not come to them. When asked, he conceded that the CEC may agree to

allow NLD members in ethnic areas to formally meet with cease-fire groups, but said the Uncles would likely insist on arranging the meetings themselves.

15. (C) Nyan Win told us that some party leaders were concerned about holding talks with ethnic groups without ASSK present. Nevertheless, he said the CEC decided it was best to publicly reiterate ASSK's call for talks with these groups. Nyan Win pointed out that the purpose of these discussions would not be to convince ethnic leaders to support all of the NLD's positions. Rather, he said the CEC agreed with ASSK that discussing differences was a worthy democratic goal in and of itself, even if it did not result in complete agreement.

16. (C) Nyan Win reported that some prominent NLD members did not want the public to know the substance of what the CEC discussed with ASSK and objected to the statement he released to the press following their January 30 meeting (reftel A). He speculated that some in the NLD jealously guarded their communications with ASSK and were concerned with the impact her sentiments would have on their standing within the party.

He blamed these dissenters for recent rumors that ASSK had not given him approval to publicly discuss their meeting. When asked, Nyan Win said that ASSK told him he should convey

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her sentiments to the Burmese people and gave him discretion over how best to do so.

U GAMBIRA, NAY PHONE LATT UPDATE

17. (C) We have confirmed that authorities have postponed a hearing for detained monk U Gambira and his elder brother, Ko Aung Kyaw Kyaw. Ma Khin Thu Htay, U Gambira's sister, told us she met with her brothers in Insein prison on February 4 and said both men are healthy. Authorities did not tell her or her brothers when their next hearing will take place. In January, U Gambira and his brother were charged under Burma's Unlawful Associations Act and face up to three years in prison if convicted (reftel B).

18. (C) Opposition lawyer Aung Thein told us the regime has charged arrested activist and web blogger Nay Phone Latt with violating provisions of Burma's Video Act. The Video Act prohibits the unauthorized creation, reproduction, or distribution of videos. Aung Thein was trying to determine what provisions of the law authorities have accused the blogger of having violated. However, if convicted, Nay Phone Latt could receive as much as three years in prison, according to the lawyer. Nay Phone Latt was arrested on January 30 and has been held at the Ministry of Home Affairs Rangoon detention facility since then (reftel C).

COMMENT

19. (C) Comment. The NLD's invitation sends the right message, but is essentially a hollow gesture. The CEC knows that few, if any, of these ethnic cease-fire groups would be willing or able to travel to the NLD's Rangoon headquarters for an open meeting with the Uncles. Nor would the regime likely permit it to take place. Without something more than a standing invitation to stop by, we doubt that any substantive discussions will result from this statement. Nonetheless, the NLD's declaration that disagreement is an essential part of democracy sends an important message that the party of Aung San Suu Kyi does not accept Than Shwe's vision of democracy without dissent. End Comment.

VILLAROSA